

Lesson Six

Obedience – Know when to go – do not procrastinate, it lessens the blessing

Sometimes I know there are big ripe juicy blackberries in the forest just waiting for me. I know I need to get out there and pick them before the animals or time beat me to them. If I wait too long, heat can dry them out or they can grow mushy on the vine. The problem is I just don't *feel* like picking berries! There can be a multitude of reasons why I don't *feel* like it: it's too hot; I'm too tired; there's a great movie on TV or I'd just rather do something else. Honestly, getting all geared up in a long sleeve shirt with my thermal socks on my arms so I can sweat off my bug spray in 100% humidity is usually the last thing I want to do. But then I start thinking about fresh blackberry cobbler and I gradually forget the temporary discomfort. The memory of blackberry syrup for pancakes gets me off the couch and blackberry muffins distract me while I'm suiting up in my protective gear! I can almost taste the fresh blackberry pie as I grab my bucket and head out into the heat and humidity.

God has a purpose for each and every one of us, whether we have accepted Jesus' gift of eternal life or not. Examples of this are throughout the Bible, but some of my favorites are in the book of Daniel. First, let's recall Deuteronomy 31:14-18 where God warned Israel if they were disobedient and did not keep God's covenant, He would abandon them to their wicked ways. After Moses died, Joshua led the people. After Joshua died, Israel had a series of Judges, then Kings who led them. Reading these books can get monotonous because a pattern of disobedience, punishment, repentance and restoration soon emerges. Each time,

the cycle is repeated the people grow further and further from the Lord and their repentance and recommitment was less sincere and more short-lived. There are four stages to this cycle: stage 1-the people commit to the Lord and serve him faithfully; stage 2- gradually the people drift away and begin to worship other gods; stage 3-the Lord removes his protection from them as a result of their wicked behavior and they are overtaken by neighboring nations; stage 4-the people cry out to the Lord and repent, He forgives and restores them. Finally, 2 Chronicles 36:11-20 explains how and why God handed them all over to the Babylonians.

The book of Daniel is among my favorite books of the Bible. I can read it over and over and find a new nugget of strength, encouragement and love each time. It's easy to see why God chose Daniel and his friends to be among the remnant that survived the fall of Jerusalem and were exiled to Babylon. Their faith and complete trust in the Lord was an example to the entire nation of Babylon many times. Chapter 4 is different from the others in that it isn't God's chosen who are suffering and need rescue, this time it's King Nebuchadnezzar himself. God warns Nebuchadnezzar in a dream and after the miracles that take place in the first three chapters you'd think Nebuchadnezzar would listen! Unfortunately, his pride was his downfall. The story illustrates how God is completely in control, whether we believe in Him and submit our lives to Him or not. God has a purpose for us all.

If you've never read the book of Jonah, take a few minutes to do so. It is four short chapters that give deep insights to our human nature and God's sovereignty. God's purpose for Jonah

was fulfilled, but it took three days in the belly of a whale to convince him God's way was best.

There are times in life when we know what we should do, but we delay. We put it off because the situation or task is unpleasant. We tell ourselves that if we do nothing, it may resolve itself. Or that it's really not our problem in the first place and if we don't do it, someone else will. Maybe we think we're overstepping our bounds and poking our nose in where it shouldn't be, and it's just better to let things play out on their own. Sometimes, as in Jonah's case, we may even be afraid that we will be successful.

We've all been there – a child making poor choices, a friend in over her head, a husband who has different goals and priorities than our own. Do we suffer in silence? Tell ourselves that the cliff rushing toward them won't really hurt that much, and besides it's their choice! Hey, no one ever listens and eventually they are responsible for their own path, so better for them to learn it for themselves the hard way, right? Dear sister, these are the times when we have to prayerfully lay our concerns before the Lord and ask for His wisdom and guidance. We may be spared the confrontation, but I've learned that generally when the Lord places something on my heart and mind, it's because He expects something from me. The longer I delay the more anguish I suffer. I torture myself with thoughts of: "should I tell them? What if this is just my OPINION? If they wanted my advice, they'd ask for it. They'll hate me for saying it" and the classic, "what if I'm wrong?"

The Bible provides guidelines for situations such as these. First, pray about it. Give it over to the Lord and ask Him to show you what, if anything, He wants you to do. If the response still

seems to be telling you that God expects you to handle this and you're like me, you want confirmation, it's ok to be Gideon (Judges 6:36-40) and ask. Being a writer, I like to write down what I want to say to the person and WHY. Is this just a matter of wanting things done MY way? Is this my cautious, skeptical nature getting in the way of someone else's dream? Or do I have very sound reasons and evidence for wanting to intervene? The Bible tells us to correct one another and to speak our corrections *in love*. Can I do that? Or am I too emotionally involved?

Sometimes our area of disobedience is in our own lives. Perhaps it's an area that we are refusing to relinquish control and release to God. I believe this is different than the repentance examination we conducted of ourselves in lesson two. This is where we have identified an area of our life as sinful, but we do not repent of it and we continue the behavior. By disobeying God, we expose ourselves to the consequences of our sin and risk the removal of His protection in our lives. We could also be delaying the fulfillment of His purpose for our life and the blessings He's had planned for us.

For example, I acknowledge that I am overweight. This is caused by my sin of overeating, yet I have not repented of my sin and turned this area of my life over to God. By refusing to relinquish this to Him, I could be exposing myself to health risks caused by being overweight. Back pain, additional strain on my knees and ankles, pre-diabetes and heart disease may all be in my future if I continue on my current path. I am also wasting the monetary resources He has blessed my family with because I need to buy clothes. This is an additional expense I am incurring unnecessarily. I have plenty of clothes, it's just that none of them fit me

anymore. Being overweight also affects others' opinions of me. I may be passed over for promotion or not be considered for a new job because people perceive me as lazy and undisciplined. I am definitely delaying His blessing of feeling confident and comfortable in my own body which may affect my relationship with my husband. If I do not feel comfortable with my appearance, I may avoid sexual contact with my husband which may lead to a myriad of other issues and problems. With so much at stake, why haven't I given this up to God? It's a very good question. Don't I trust that He can overcome it? I trust that God can overcome anything, but I believe I am too weak to succeed. I am not putting my full faith and trust in Him. I am not relying on His strength and love for me. What will it take for me to be obedient and surrender this to God? Sometimes I feel Jonah got off easy with only three days in the belly of the whale.

We need to remember that Jesus' commitment to us began before we were ever conceived, He is certainly not going to desert us when we need him the most. Jesus came to set us free, free from all the forces that enslave us. He stands ready to help whatever our struggle may be. Please understand, dear sister, we cannot be wholly committed to serving Him and fulfilling His purpose for us until we have allowed Him access to our entire life to free us from all our bondage. We must rid ourselves of these things so that we can move forward. Lot's wife disobeyed the angels sent to rescue them from God's wrath when He destroyed Sodom and suffered the consequences (Genesis 19:15-26). Let us all heed God's warnings and obey.

Assessment and Further Thought

What areas of your life are holding back from God? Why do you think you are holding on to them?

List some possible consequences of continued disobedience in this area.

What will it take for you to surrender?

What are your expectations for God's intervention?

Verses for study and encouragement

John 16:33 - "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Isaiah 50:2 – When I came, why was there no one? When I called, why was there no one to answer? Was my arm too short to deliver you? Do I lack the strength to rescue you? By a mere rebuke I dry up the sea, I turn rivers into a desert . . . "

Isaiah 50:9-10 – It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me. Who will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up. Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the word of His servant? Let the one who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the Lord and rely on their God.

Psalms 62:8 – Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.

Prayer time

Dear Jesus, guide me in identifying the areas of my life that I have refused to relinquish to You. Show me the possible consequences of my disobedience and grant me Your strength to finally let go and accept Your healing. Please provide ways for me to rely on You and find support to overcome my waywardness. Enable me to give myself completely to You and Your Will. Amen

Additional items for prayer